30 October - 1 November 1987

The ROYAL ANGUS HOTEL, Birmingham

NOVACON 17

The Annual Convention of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

GUEST OF HONOUR IAIN BANKS

PROGRESS REPORT

NUMBER TWO

A SCENE FROM "THE WASP FACTORY"

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Bernie at work

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CHAIRMAN'S BIT

Welcome to P.R.TWO.

This time round the Chairman's Bit is given over to a more detailed explanation of our policy to restrict memberships to 350 only.

When I, as chairman of NOVACON 17, decided to hold the convention at the Royal Angus Hotel I was told by a large number of fans that it was not feasible any more, the con had outgrown the Angus and needed a larger hotel. As I did not want to go outside Birmingham, and as the other good Con hotel in Brum, the Grand, had already made it clear to us, via their extortionate terms, that they did not really want us, I decided to stick to my original decision to return to the Angus.

As already explained in P.R. One, I wanted this Novacon to echo earlier ones both in its format and its attendance, and the Angus, with its history of good cons, is the ideal venue. I agree it is small compared to a lot of other convention hotels. This, in my own very personal opinion, adds to its charm and to its desirability as a con hotel, and so here we are again, with a hotel that wants us, that gives us good cons, but is small. The only logical thing to do was restrict memberships.

I have heard rumours and rumblings, which I would like to put an end to here. 350 means 350. It does not mean 350 plus any-one big and important enough who arrives late. We will not be turning away unknown fans and then letting in famous authors, we are not "saving" a few memberships for well known fans. We are accepting memberships on a "First-come First-served" basis, whether your name is Joe Bloggs or Isaac Asimov the only way you get in is to register before the 350 limit is reached.

As the 350 limit refers to "Bodies in the Building" we have decided to introduce SUPPORTING MEMBERSHIPS, please see the separate article elsewhere in this P.R. for full details.

The leaflet with this P.R. also gives full details of how supporting membership will work, and how to change if you wish to do so. We must stress the following two points, however.

1. Supporting will not guarantee the right to convert to attending once the 350 limit is reached, even if you were originally an attending member before this offer, so THINK CAREFULLY BEFORE YOU DECIDE TO SUPPORT ONLY.

2. You cannot change to supporting after the cut off date for postal applications, 26/10/87. This means that if you plan to attend and are prevented from doing so at the last minute you are stuck with it, again this is normal at other conventions.

These points are included in both the article and leaflet previously mentioned. I make no apology for this apparent overkill, I do not want any possible misunderstandings to arise.

One final note on infants who come free. We do not want to prevent an adult from attending by filling up the membership list with tiny children. Your tiny children are very very welcome, (please see our article about the creche), but they will not be given a membership number or be treated in any way as a member unless you have paid for them. We will give them a special badge with their name, but no other convention material of any kind.

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SUPPORTING MEMBERSHIP

It has been mentioned that a substantial number of fans register for the Con but do not actually attend. Examination of past records would tend to bear this out. As the 350 limit refers to "Bodies in the Building" we have decided to introduce SUPPORTING MEMBERSHIPS, which are the norm at other conventions anyway.

If you are one of those people who would prefer to support Novacon, if supporting memberships were available, now is your chance to do so.

To change to supporting membership please fill in the form on the leaflet enclosed with this P.R. and send it to Mick Evans at the address shown, and we will refund the difference just as soon as we can.

We are offering supporting memberships so that fans who want to receive all the usual Convention literature, including the NOVA voting form and the souvenir short story booklet by our Guest of Honour, Iain Banks, but not to actually attend the convention, can do so. We believe a number of you who have already registered would have supported if that option had been available before, if so, here is your opportunity.

We cannot offer the usual supporting terms, partly because we only decided part way through to offer supporting memberships, and partly because of the 350 membership limit.

So before deciding please note carefully the following points.

1. To support is HALF the rate you paid to attend, so if you paid £8 we will refund £4, and if you paid £10 we will refund £5.

2. To convert, or re-convert, to attending will be a further £5, regardless of when you first joined or supported.

3. Supporting members are not guaranteed the right to convert to attending, once the 350 limit is reached the books will be closed. PLEASE DO NOT SUPPORT AS A WAY TO RESERVE A MEMBERSHIP YOU MAY BE DISAPPOINTED.

4. If you support you will be given a number separate from the attending list, e.g. S1,S2 etc, and any existing number you had will be re-allocated to the next attending member we receive. If you later re-convert you will be given a later number, not your original one.

5. We cannot accept supporting memberships, or conversions from attending to supporting, after the postal dead-line, which is 26/10/87.

We are sure you will understand the logic behind these conditions, put simply we want a Con attendance small enough for comfort. We want to give those who <u>know</u> they can't attend the chance to recieve everything without filling up the membership list, and at the same time save themselves a little money, and we want every name on the actual membership list to belong to an actual attendee.

If you have any queries, or even any complaints, please contact Mick or Bernie Evans on 021 707 6606, evenings & weekends, or Bernie at work on 021 373 8131 ext 2630 normal office hours.

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THE HOTEL BOOKING FORM

You will find enclosed with this P.R. your hotel booking form. Please note that only registered convention members can book hotel space. The form should be self-explanatory, but I will just mention a couple of points here.

The matter of vegetarian food is on this form and on your original booking form so we can get across to the hotel staff that vegetarian food is needed by residents at breakfast and by all attendees at all other meals whether they are resident or not. This matter has long been a thorn in the side for con committees at the Angus, but this time we hope we'll get it right!!

The section for "Special Requirements" is particularly important if you have such problems as asthma and must have non-feather pillows, for example. We will be noting these ourselves, and getting the hotel to double check on the Friday morning.

Please send the form to Mick at the Convention address, see inside front cover, not directly to the hotel. They will be taken to the hotel in batches, so don't worry if you don't recieve confirmation for a few weeks.

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FOOD AND DRINK

Not a lot to say really, just to confirm what was said in P.R.1.

Food will be provided on an almost continuous basis, no mad scramble to get fed within 30 minutes or whatever.

There will be 3 bars, one a real ale bar, providing continuous service for all the alcoholics amongst us, and the real ale will be in the main bar, which will be tho one open the most.

One small point, VAT wasn't increased on booze in the budget, so the bar prices haven't risen. (perhaps not such a small point after all!)

We promise to do our best (Can you tell I was a Brownie?) on the matter of food for vegetarians. We've also had a request for diabetic food, which will be passed on to the hotel staff.

The main reason for including this small section on food and drink was to enable me to print the cartoon on the right, I couldn't resist it, and I have been assured it's not about me!!

"HE WANTS A SHORT"

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IAIN BANKS BY M. JOHN HARRISON

How do you describe Iain Banks?

Clearly you begin by saying he wrote a book called "THE WASP FACTORY". Reading this book is like having your head taken off slowly while someone recites a list of meaningless but significant small items in your ear; after which you understand something about people, politics, sex, sexual politics, and THE BEANO you didn't understand before.

Less easy to introduce is the appalling act of compassion on which this work rests, and which in turn is demanded of you as you finish reading it. How does a writer come to feel so responsible that he reflects the responsibilities of an entire generation? So responsible that, looking calmly back on the wreckage of the Sixties, he is able to show by exact extension where the guilty wreckage of the Eighties will be washed up, and on what kind of shore? (This in one so young, and so loony too, who recently in the flat Kentish dawn almost re-enacted the beginning of his third book, THE BRIDGE, wiping out a brick wall with his favourite, not to say only, Volvo. "Shit")

The answer to this conundrum--you can regard it as central if you like, Banks is a big enough writer to have a central conundrum--stares bleary-eyed out of the opening of THE BRIDGE, out of that written-off automobile, a more human wreck than any of J G Ballard's. Banks is the man who worries about meeting himself coming the other way, El Bonko reminding us that we're never quite the road-hog we think we are, or would secretly like to be. Or is it that we're always worse?

Iain is our self-knowledge, if you like, acting itself out. Our conscience.

This view wasn't shared by his more sclerotic reviewers when in 1984 they encountered Frank Cauldhame on the wind-swept islet, a bag of dead birds swinging at his side, his lethal catapult Black Destroyer at the ready, and his madder brother already moving towards him from telephone to telephone across the Scottish mainland. What they felt was quite the opposite, that Banks had thrown conscience to the winds:

> "A silly, gloatingly sadistic and grisly yarn...a bit better written than most horror hokum but really just the literary equivalent of a video nasty."
>
> Sunday Express

> "...the crassly explicit language, the obscenity of the plot..."
>
> The Times

> "...ghoulish frivolity and a good deal of preposterous sadism. Unfortunately the novel's satiric intention is overwhelmed by his relish for exorbitant brutalities."
>
> T.L.S.

But Banks' brutality is less exorbitant than exuberant--even generous. If you've read the book and understand its meaning , that is if you've understood the way its events and images are marshalled by its obvious intent, you will know there is more than a little hysteria in these reactions. They illustrate how much the literary reviewers know about video nasties (or for that matter about satiric intention); how rarely they read the language of "horror hokum", or listen to the language ordinary people in Britain speak; and how unlikeley they are to be able to identify either the conscience of the horror writer or the horror of conscience.

More importantly perhaps, because we're used to literary incompetence, it demonstrates how divorced they have become not only from the landscape but also the sensibility of the "new" Britain, that uneasy collective conscience never quite lulled to rest by share issues, which requires a wasp factory of a sort to elucidate.

In Orr's strange fictions--his "dreams" on the bridge--images of mirrors abound: polar antithesis is constantly exchanged for polar symetry: the Self constantly folds into, and is replaced by, the Other. The people we have most to fear, the people we need to understand, among the wrecked inner cities and abandoned industrial estates, the cheap bedraggled politics and easy (not to say glamorous) moral let-outs of the Eighties, are ourselves.

A decade or so ago writers like Ian McEwan and magazines like NEW WORLDS began the kind of obsessional but sympathetic, rambling but realistic, sampling of the new Britain--its landscapes of exploitation and exhaustion as seen from the windows of empty factories and of pornography shops--which finds sophistication in Banks' work.

Fictionally more evolved than "Homemade" or "Conversations with a Cupboard Man", yet more immediately relevant than "Running Down" or "Egnaro", Iain Banks' wasp factory is the literary equivalent of Frank Cauldhame's: Banks sends you down the passageways of his books, and the way you die represents in symbolic form some guess at the shape of your times, your situation psychological and social.

How do you identify Iain Banks?

If reading THE WASP FACTORY left you feeling as if you had been plugged by the three middle fingers of your right hand into a wall socket, and there left to suffer intense but slow convulsions under the impact of a new kind of electricity, you have to thank for it a tall thin Scot who, when he takes off his spectacles, is revealed to have the mild rather absent-minded eyes of a schoolboy.

He will be walking round the Royal Angus Hotel during the Convention in an unassuming brown leather jacket and corduroy trousers. When you come across him in a corridor, or an empty hall, he will seem quite normal. If, on meeting, both of you look at each other and flinch suddenly, now you know why.

His right hand is your left. What he knows about THE BEANO is what you know.

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CRECHE NEWS

By Carol Morton

We had intended to have the Birmingham Pre-school Playgroups Assn. to run the Creche this year, as they have done in the past, but the fees they would have charged would have made the cost prohibitive. They also were not prepared to operate for as many hours per day as we wanted them to. After due consultation we have conned, sorry-asked, Bernie's daughter Vicky to look after the little 'uns. She is fully capable of doing this, having had considerable experience looking after babies and young children.

Vicky has said she will run the creche 24 hours a day, (keen to help ain't she?), but obviously this is not possible as she has to sleep sometime, and so the creche will close at 10.00 P.M.

Vicky cannot run the creche on her own all the time, indeed I'm sure you wouldn't want to impose on her good nature in that way, so parents who leave their children in the creche will be expected to help out for an hour or so at a time. A rota will be left in the creche for your convenience. We would also like you to sign your children in & out so we can tell at a glance who should be in the creche at any one time. You will also be expected to collect the children to give them their meals.

As the creche is not being run by professionals equipment will not be provided, apart from cots which Bernie has asked the hotel to provide, and perhaps a single bed or two. It would be very helpful if you could bring along a favourite toy, or even several, clearly labelled please, and you MUST provide disposable nappies for the younger ones.

If this list of "Musts" seems dictatorial please be assured it isn't meant to be, it's meant to help us run a successful creche in which your children will be happy, and NO COST WHATSOEVER TO YOURSELVES.

PLEASE HELP US TO HELP YOU TO ENJOY PEACE OF MIND DURING THE CON.

A footnote from Bernie:
Faced with the choice between cancelling the creche or asking parents to run it entirely themselves, I decided to ask Vicky to help out if she was prepared to. She is 16, very sensible, and has looked after her two nieces for days at a time when their mum has been in hospital. I assure you that you can trust her with your children, and I am very grateful to her for helping us out like this.

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BABY-LISTENING SERVICE

You may be interested in a service which the hotel offers, via the telephone system, which operates in a way very similar to the microphone type baby alarms which some of you may have in your own homes. If you dial 53 on your phone in the hotel room, and then leave the phone off the hook, you can then dial your own number from any other phone in the hotel and listen-in. I understand this system is free of charge, but if you decide to use it I suggest you check any possible cost with the hotel, and also that you check it is working correctly before you leave your baby.

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METAMORPHOSIS BY HELEN WAKE

Kisimbanna the Magician was as old as the hills, and unbelievably twisted. He was also immensely powerful, but, as he often reflected, much good it did him, when even his own creations dropped dead on contact with his spiritual halitosis.

One day, as he was delving into a particularly obscure and ancient tome, he discovered what could be the answer to all his problems. If he could pour all of his fell knowledge and foul nature between the pages of books, and if he could persuade people to read these books, (this being the most crucial part), then by an old trick of Karmic balancing he would take on the aspect of a much younger and nicer person.

He set immediately to work, and met with success which went far beyond his expectations. While his books were vile, vicious and nasty in the extreme, they exerted a strange fascination over people. If anyone ever idly flicked through one in a bookshop they felt a strange compulsion to read it.

One day, assuming a new name, and with a carefully thought out background, he ventured forth into the world. He chose a Science Fiction Convention for his debut, so he wouldn't feel too out of place.

By this time his books were very widely read indeed, so that to all who met him he seemed to be a thoroughly nice young chap, affable, charming, and a good bloke to have a drink with. To his surprise, the experience of being treated like this made him start to feel and act, and yes, to actually BE a much nicer person.

Today this process is well on its way to completion. It remains only to say that if you would like to help him in his rehabilitation, just look him up at Novacon, buy him a drink, and tell him he's wonderful.

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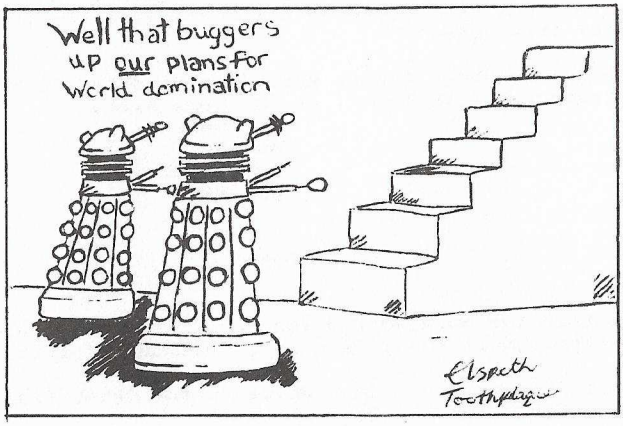

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THE NOVA AWARDS BY MARTIN TUDOR

The Novas are for fanzines produced by *science fiction fans* in the British Isles, created in 1973 by the late Gillon Field and presented annually at the Birmingham Science Fiction Group's Novacon. The Nova was, until 1981, awarded to the editor of the fanzine voted "Best of the Year". Since then there have been two additional Novas awarded each year to the fanwriter and fanartist voted "Best of the Year".

For a fanzine to qualify *one* or more issues must have appeared between the 1st of October 1986 and the 30th of September 1987. For fanwriters and fanartists to qualify, a piece of writing or artwork by the person concerned must have been published in a fanzine for the first time between the 1st of October 1986 and the 30th of September 1987. For the purposes of this award a *fanzine* shall be defined as an amateur publication which is concerned with science fiction, fantasy, science fiction and fantasy fans and/or related subjects, and copies of which may be obtained in exchange for other amateur publications or in response to letters of comment.

The fundamental idea of the Nova Awards as they have been run since 1981 is that they should be awarded by informed vote. Informed votes come from informed voters, who for the purpose of the Nova Awards are defined as any full or supporting members of the Novacon at which the award is to be made, provided he or she has also been active in fanzines in the British Isles during the year terminating on the 30th of September of the current year. "Active in fanzines" is a bit harder to define.

Over recent years there has apparently been some confusion amongst fans as to whether or not they are eligible to vote. To avoid such confusion in future, the Nova Award Committee has decided to redefine the term "active in fanzines" as applied to the awards. After much discussion, both at last year's Novacon and in the many months since, the Nova Awards Rules have been amended to read:

> "For the purpose of these Awards, 'to be active in fanzines' means 'to have recieved six or more fanzines during the course of the relevant year' *Fanzines* in this instance means *different publications* and *not* different issues of the same fanzine. The various official organs of a group or society shall not be treated as different fanzines for the purposes of this rule."

Any queries about the Nova Awards should be directed to the current Nova Administrator, Martin Tudor, at 121 Cape Hill,
Smethwick,
Warley,
West Midlands,
B66 4SH

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P.R.3 will contain the Nova voting form and, hopefully, another short article by Martin. Until then, here is a reminder of last year's winners:

Best Fanzine	Owen Whiteoak for "Pink Fluffy Bedsocks"
Best Fanwriter	Owen Whiteoak
Best fanartist	Atom

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THE PROGRAMME

You're probably saying to yourself "These articles & cartoons are all very well but when is she going to tell us about the programme?"

The truth is, there still isn't much to tell, we have the programme all mapped out, and have many verbal confirmations, but we are still waiting for formal written confirmations before I am prepared to mention specific names in print. The reason for this is that I don't want you to feel let down should a person whom we have named later find that they cannot after all be on the programme.

I can tell you that we plan to have an Artists Duel, a Fantasy Panel, the subject matter of which will be very controversial, and films. We also plan talks by various individuals, a quiz, a panel game, a disco, a midnight reading by our Guest of Honour and others, so be assured there will be plenty happening, and if we don't tell you all about it now you've got to read P.R.3 haven't you??

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CHEAP TRAVEL

We have been negotiating on your behalf with "That's Entertrainment", and P.R.3 will also contain a form for you to book cheap rail travel through them. We have been told by several people that British Rail's own Blue Period cheap return may be even cheaper, so it might be well worth checking it out for yourselves before you book. Please note also that people travelling on tickets booked by "That's Entertrainment" may be asked for proof of acommodation before they are allowed to travel. If you are not actually staying at the Angus, although it probably depends how busy/conscientious B.R. staff are, it may again be worth booking direct with B.R. yourself.

A Scots fan told me at Beccon about a coach firm which does a fantastic deal. It cost him £19 return from Glasgow to Birmingham, tea and sandwiches are provided free on board, and the coach stops RIGHT OUTSIDE THE ANGUS. They are based in Perth, not Glasgow, so probably it is possible to travel with them from other parts of Scotland as well. I'm afraid I dont have the address, but they are called "Stage Coach Limited" and their phone number is Perth 33481. If you are coming from Scotland it would be well worth checking out.

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CAR PARKING

We will provide detailed information on travelling by car, and on how to get to the Angus from the bus/railway station in P.R.3, due to lack of space here. We have, however, been asked about car parking at the Angus. The Angus has no car park of its own, but an N.C.P car park behind the hotel has an entrance into the hotel. You can leave without paying if the car park is unattended, and it is unattended at the weekend. I cannot vouch for this personally, (I don't drive), but the same information was given to people who came to Fifteencon, and I didn't hear of any complaints.

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THE MEMBERS

63 Eric Bentcliffe
64 Marcus L Rowland
65 Chris Bursey
66 Jim Barker
67 Steve Green
68 Ann Green
69 Stuart Hall
70 Susan Chamberlain
71 Michael Gould
72 Vernon Brown
73 Martin Stallard
74 Paul Oldroyd
75 Chris Donaldson
76 Freda Warrington
77 Colin Langeveld
78 David Symes
79 Fay Symes
80 Mike Scantlebury
81 Ken Slater
82 Joyce Slater
83 Owen Whiteoak
84 Robin Levy
85 Rowena Levy
86 Terry Broome
87 Peter Smith
88 Urban Gunnarsson
89 Alun Harries
90 Martin Reed
91 Liz Burak
92 Paul Brazier
93 Rob Hansen
94 Avedon Carol
95 Bob Shaw (Real)
96 Bob Shaw (Fake)
97 Dave C Holmes
98 Helen Holmes
99 Mike Christie
100 Sherry Goldsmith
101 Stephen Hanson
102 John Mottershead
103 Lynn M Edwards
104 M J Simpson
105 J C Rees
106 George Ternent
107 Linda Ternent
108 Rory O McLean
109 Lisanne Norman
110 Stu Andrews
111 Jonathan C Salmon
112 Niall M Gordon
113 Ray Bradbury
114 Andy McMaster
115 David Gemmell
116 Steve Hubbard
117 Charlotte Bulmer
118 Dave Cox
119 William McCabe
120 Steve Jones
121 Steve Boyce
122 Howard Rosenblum
123 June Rosenblum
124 Paul Gamble
125 Leslie Jameson
126 Martin Hoare
127 Katie Hoare
128 Mike Westhead
129 Kathy Westhead
130 Robert Day
131 Jean Sheward
132 Susan Booth
133 Susie Cheyne
134 Brian Burgess
135 Tony Rogers
136 Terry Pratchett
137 Rob Jackson
138 Alan Dorey
139 Rochelle Dorey
140 Colin Fine
141 Pete Cohen
142 Julian Headlong
143 Mike Damesick
144 Ian Sorenson
145 Dave Thomas
146 Peter Thompson
147 Christina Lake
148 Dave Langford
149 Hazel Langford
150 Clive Warren
151 Jeanette Warren
152 Gill Taylor
153 Christopher O'Shea
154 Peter Day
155 Mike LLewellyn
156 Dave French
157 Shirley French
158 Rod Milner
159 Simon Beresford
160 Bridget Wilkinson
161 Tony Berry
162 Anne Hamill
163 Jimmy Robertson
164 Steve Lawson
165 Laura Wheatley
166 Mike Moir
167 Debby Moir
168 Elda Wheeler
169 Mike Molloy
170 Greg Pickersgill
171 Linda Pickersgill
172 Phillip A Cowan
173 Mark Meenan
174 Peter Weston
175 Eileen Weston
176 Barry Bayley
177 Jim Deakin
178 Alex Stewart
179 Ken Cheslin
180 Bruce Saville
181 Kike Ibeji
182 David B Wake
183 Helen Wake
184 Gareth Rees
185 Roger Perkins
186 Anne Page
187 1/2R Cruttenden
188 Wendy Cruttenden
189 Nic Farey
190 Dave Liddle
191 Ian Williams
192 Andy Morris
193 John Steward
194 David Swinden
195 Laurence Day
196 Mark Smith
197 Julia Smith
198 Trevor Clews
199 Hugh Mascetti
200 Stuart Raper
201 Ray Thompson
202 John Jarrold
203 Pam Wells
204 Donald Thompson
205 D M Sherwood
206 Andy Richards
207 Peter Watts
208 M K Williams
209 S Williams
210 Graham Daniels
211 Phil Petty
212 Lil
213 Bacchus
214 Marsha Jones
215 Maggie Pinfold
216 Alan Cash
217 Keith Banks
218 Carol Joy Bennett
219 G Church
220 Maureen Porter
221 Paul Kincaid
222 Carol Morton
223 Tony Morton

New members since P.R.1, up to late June.

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